

way between the pavers within days of the pots arriving. Ants are another problem and should be deterred from nesting in pots as they delight in burrowing around the root system.

Here I must add a note of warning - if using commercial potting mixes do not inhale the dust, as certain pathogens (eg Legionnaires' Disease) can dwell in timber refuse which forms a large part of that mix (sawdust, wood chips, pine bark etc). Make sure that you open the bag carefully, in the open air, and if it feels dry add water to dampen the mix before going any further. Good quality mixes are packed damp. It is also wise to wear a simple face mask when first opening the bag.

There are two main types of pots used for plants - plastic and terra cotta - with a few growers preferring ceramic, concrete or timber. Plastic pots are light in weight and therefore the larger ones are so much easier to handle, however they do heat up much more quickly than terra cotta and this can be a disadvantage in extremely hot climates. Terra cotta pots, on the other hand, whilst being heavy to handle do ensure cool roots in hot weather but also need more water than plastic as the material absorbs a great amount. Another plus for terra cotta is that the heavier pots make for better stability in windy conditions. Whatever pots you use it is essential that there are sufficient holes in the base to ensure free drainage and it may be necessary to make more holes than the manufacturer provides. If the drainage holes are so large that the potting mix escapes, the problem can be remedied by lining the inside of the pot base with a single thickness of shade cloth or plastic fly-wire. Don't use metal material as this will quickly rot and the problem returns. Raising the pots above the ground as recommended above will also ensure that the drainage holes are clear of soil or pavement so that free drainage is possible. Never stand the pots in saucers of water.

When selecting a suitable pot for any particular plant, consider the root system of that plant. Rhizomatous begonias have a shallow root system and therefore need a shallow pot, whilst the cane-like begonias have deep root systems and need a deep pot for best results. Generally speaking I recommend that squat pots be used for rhizomatous, rexes, semperflorens and the smaller shrub-like but some of the upright growing rhizomatous need a larger and deeper container. Deeper pots are also best for the cane-like, thick stemmed, tuberous and semi-tuberous varieties while some of the larger cane-like need quite large tubs for best results.

pH

This cryptic sign is used to denote the degree of acidity or alkalinity of a soil. The pH of your garden soil or potting mix must be within specific limits for best results. Once the soil becomes either too acid or too alkaline certain of the essential nutrients will become unavailable to your plants and poor